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A HOPI INDIAN FINDS CHRIST

By

J. P. Suderman

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A HOPI INDIAN FINDS CHRIST

The Experience of Mr. K. T. Johnson

and

His Judgment on Idolatry



Mr. K. T. Johnson

Prepared by

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Missionary to the Hopi Indians
Oraibi, Arizona

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CHAPTER I

THE EXPERIENCE OF MR. K. T. JOHNSON

Native Christian
ORAIBI, ARIZONA

(As told to Missionary J. P. Suderman)

My name is Tuwaletstewa. When I was thirty years old, I was living in the Hopi religion. My relatives wanted to put me into the ceremonies, so they prepared me for them. I should not be a fornicator, a thief, nor a murderer. I learned from the chiefs about these things. When I would be forty years old, I should be the leader of my ceremony. If I would disobey my gods, they would punish me; so I tried my best.

At one time Mr. Frey came from Tuba City (about fifty miles from here) to show pictures over here. My wife went to the meetings, but I did not go. Mr. Frey had put up a tent. In the daytime he visited the Hopis. I hated the missionaries and my heart was aroused. When my wife started to go to church, she began to talk to me; but I paid no attention. Prior to the opening of the meeting, the village crier would call out for the people to come. I did not go for several days. I began, however, to think about the Hopi prophecy. It said that some one from

the East should come to deliver us from our enemies and set us free. He would also bring a looking-glass with him and in it we could find out what kind of a man we are. He would be somebody who would have great power. So I began to think that the prophecy is like the Bible which says that when He comes, everybody would be free. The gospel must be the thing we have been waiting for. I did not know that it was the Holy Spirit talking to me, but now I know.

Now it started to work in me from both sides. I was trying to find out which was the best. I also began to realize that this was the One the Hopis were waiting for. I didn't go to church yet, but my mind began to stick to the gospel. I wanted to know more about the gospel and myself. When the last meeting in the tent came, it was at night. This time I was going to know. So I dressed myself up like a Navajo Indian. Soon there was singing in the tent. As I came to the tent, I looked for a hole where I could peep through; but I found none. So I took my knife and cut a little hole into the tent so I could look through. I tried to find out what people were there. The missionary was just showing the heart pictures and it made me angry. That evening my wife again wanted to talk to me, but I stopped her. Mr. Frey went from here to Polacca, about seventeen miles farther east. Then I began to think more. No sleep came to me because

there was a fight in me. I did not know that it was the devil and the Spirit. I did not know what to do.

At that time I was a great song-writer. They honored me by that and used these songs in the dances. I wanted to write many songs yet. I also wanted to be converted, but not baptized. In my heart I believed the story of Jesus. I had in my mind three plans. My first plan was to write songs, but not dance, I thought I could see them, but not take part. My second plan was to be baptized, but not before my people. I thought I could be baptized at Phoenix. But then I began to think, why should I not make it public, because it was time to fulfil Hopi prophecy. Nine others were converted. I went to one of them, an old blind man, and talked with him about it, and soon everything began to be very real to me. I dropped my two plans and wanted to be baptized before my people before I would be in my old ceremony. Then I began to think about my past life, about the snake dances, the Hopi medicine, to whom I had prayed, the ceremony offerings, and the unleavened bread. But now I am a new converted man. That night I went to the missionary, Mr. Duerksen. I visited him, and he talked with me until I had more understanding.

I want to tell you something else. Before I was converted, I was the greatest smoker among my people. In my work I had a pile

of cigarettes near me to last for the whole day. I liked smoking better than the food I ate. Smoking was to be my dessert. When my meal was not yet finished, I would start smoking cigarettes. I did not care for any fruit. It was hard to put off.

When the day of baptism came, I was also in the group. We were baptized on a Sunday afternoon. We all received the Holy Spirit and came home happy. Our burdens of sin were all rolled away. We were as if we were going out from under a heavy load. When I came back, supper was ready. I began to look around in my house, and in the corner were hanging a bunch of empty tobacco sacks. I did not know that I had my house decorated with thirty sacks of Bull Durham hanging on the wall. I put all of them into the fire. On top of the shelves were standing boxes of Prince Albert tobacco; these too went into the fire. In my closet I found the things I had used in the snake dances. I took down the feathers (prayer feathers) and other ceremonial articles and made a bonfire out of them, saying, "Let it all be burned, for now I am a Christian." I believe that Jesus died for our sins, and that he rose again, went into heaven to prepare a place for His own and that He is coming again to take us home.

After that the devil picked up tobacco sacks and piled them before me that I should smoke. It was a hard temptation. I dreamed

at night that I smoked. It was hard to overcome. Not a man can overcome it in his own power, but by the power of the Spirit. This is my own experience. A child of God should be clean as I understand it, "Be ye holy for I am holy. Touch not unclean things."

We Hopis have some kind of teaching of the underworld. When the Hopis were still there, they became very wicked, having many wives, practised fornication, and became murderers. The chief wanted to punish the evil-doers and left with half of the people and came to this place. The elders warned the people of all kinds of troubles. As soon as they came here they should all live a peaceable life.

Now that I am converted, I have received a better life from my Saviour. I began to live a cleaner life. The scripture says that we shall keep away from our mouth everything filthy. I am not ashamed to say that I have not gone to the dances for eighteen years, not even to the white man's dances, nor to picture shows. I have received help from the Holy Spirit to control myself not to smoke. Now I can smell people who have smoked when they are yards away. I think that is the way the Lord Jesus smells the unclean things of sin. Man must be clean and the Christian must be clean also. I could tell much, but this is all I'll say.

CHAPTER II

THE JUDGMENT UPON IDOLATRY (Written by Otto Lomavitu)

Aug. 22.—On the evening of this day I called upon Johnson in company with my wife. After a few introductory words Johnson spoke and said, "Otto, I have something upon my heart which I would like for you to consider and pass your judgment upon.

"My aunt died today and the fire of our clanship is extinguished. We have in our possession the Al-vo-na (the altar and the idol of the Horned-ones, a foremost secret order or ceremony) and I have been minded to burn them. I have thought of bringing these things down from the upper village and have them displayed before the public on this coming Sunday afternoon prior to burning them. Before doing this, however, I would be glad to know whether it would be scriptural or not."

I assured him that I believe it to be scriptural and that it would no doubt prove itself of greater blessing to our people. That besides this there would no doubt be a good number of white tourists out for the snake dance which was to take place on the coming Saturday in Hotevilla, a village that is eight miles north of Oraibi. Accordingly we referred this matter to the native Christians at the prayer meeting and a warm dis-

cussion followed. The oldest man and the very first convert to Christianity, and a noted hero who had made himself famous by going single handed to Santa Fe, N. M., after the captives of the Hopi children by the Mexicans and succeeded in bringing them back, was asked first to give his opinion and he answered in part:

"I have done away with idolatry many years ago and therefore I have nothing to put away." This man is an ex-priest of one of the religious ceremonies. Wik-va-ya. (It means Brought-back.)

Ta-las-nom-ti-wa the blind man and also a former priest, but now a priest unto God, was next asked being the oldest. He said in part, "I have no idols to put away. I had to do with living men, making men play the part of gods. I cannot burn them but they can burn themselves."

A long discussion followed in which it was decided that the idols should be publicly burned.

Aug. 25.—In the meantime Johnson had learned that the Al-vo-na had been taken to Hotevilla, a hostile village, by chief Yu-kiw-ma, a man who had no title to the idols in question. Upon Johnson's request, he and I went there towards evening. Upon our arrival there we were told that Yu-kiw-ma was in the kiva, (an underground association room) performing the rituals of the snake dancers. Johnson called him out and soon

brought me word that all was favorable. He said however, that the chief had stubbornly refused to let him have them to which Johnson replied, "I shall enter your house myself for them."

We went on to his house where the idols and the altar were kept. Soon the chief came and said to his sister, "Have you the key with you? Open the door and let them enter." This done we followed him through several rooms until we were in the innermost room. The room was dingy and small and we had to stoop much. The altar and the idols were there.

Yukiwma then laid his hand on the bundle of altar pieces which were hanging from the ceiling. But instead of taking it down he scrutinized us intently as though he wished to detect treachery. He then asked, "Now, who are you?" Johnson introduced us. The chief asked this not so much to know our names but to ascertain whether or not we belonged to the clanship worthy of consideration. Being satisfied as to who we were, he then proceeded to ask, "And who has sent you here? By what authority do you intend to take these things? I have doubts concerning your adventure. Has Washington or the missionaries sent you? What will you do with them?"

Johnson answered and said that he had come of his own accord. A long talk then followed in which the chief emphasized the

predominance of this altar and how it got that place. Johnson then asked him two definite questions which were, a—What good or bad have you found in these idols that has prompted you to take them away, and, b—What advantage is there in these?

The chief replied that the altar and the idols were good but that the people were bad. "If our hearts are good," he said, "we should see the desire of our heart, that is, goodness. But if our hearts are not right evil will result." (That is to say, in plain language, that the idols and the altar play no important part in the religious life of the Hopi. Why should men set these up and worship them in fear if they play no part as to results? As well leave them out and afflict themselves with the hope of obtaining their end.)

He then said in tones of deepest feeling, "Alas! it has come, but so must it be. By destroying these things you will have DESTROYED the very foundation of our ceremonies. The conflagration must spread. Take these and do as you have said." (Johnson had told him that he was going to burn them.)

We then took up our trophies and wended our way out. We could not help but feel the very presence of our Lord Jesus and no sooner had we laid our hand on the altar and idols when Johnson triumphantly cried, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth

us from all sin" to which I responded with my heartfelt amen. We then went home and had them deposited in the back rooms of the chapel where we left them to wait for their trial on serious charges of murder! These helpless creatures, helpless, though gods, in the house of Almighty God.

Aug. 26.—Snake dance in Hotevilla. In the evening of this day Johnson and another native Christian went to the upper village and brought down the remaining paraphernalia belonging to the captive idols which was still remaining in Johnson's house. Among them were real antlers of a deer. With these they brought down the idols which belong to the flute dancers.

Aug. 27.—Sunday. Baptismal and Communion service. Two young girls were baptized. After the service missionaries from other stations arrived to witness the judgment upon the wretched idols.

At half past two o'clock in the afternoon, we loaded on our booty and hauled them upon a hill which is the center of the lower village. The bell was rung and a good number from other villages were assembled. We sang several songs in Hopi. A brother missionary from Hotevilla offered prayer. Our white missionary, Mr. Karl Friesen, then gave an introductory talk explaining that what was to take place soon was not due to his efforts, but that it was through the working of the Holy Spirit that this was to

take place. He had known nothing about it until it was revealed to him at the prayer meeting.

While Johnson was arranging the altar and the idols I spoke a few words which were in part something like this, being addressed to the white tourists who were out for the snake dance. "—It is my purpose to speak along somewhat a different line this afternoon. . . . We, the aborigines, did not take to civilization by choice. In order that you might convert us to your ways of living, you are now paying taxes in order to have money to spend on our education for which we are very thankful. But by your presence in a barbarous ceremony, and especially like the interesting, writhing snake dance, you destroy what you have built just for the sake of a single pleasure. Some of us who have learned better through your benevolence are trying to pay our government our great debt, even though it be in a small degree, by trying to live out before our people what we have learned in school. Your presence in these occasions mean to an uneducated and a savage Indian that after all there must be something in his way of religion so that you, a person gifted with superior intelligence should even spend hundreds of dollars to witness it so that he had better shun civilization and keep his children at home. Shame on you. In order that our people may become fit for this great country they must

have Christ and the Bible. If you do not need Christ in civilization do let us have him."

It was now Johnson's turn to speak. He spoke first in English. He opened his Bible to Psalm 115 and read verses 4 to 8 inclusive. Then looking upon the audience squarely, he said: (Quoted in part only.)

"We are this day gathered around these idols for the purpose of burning them. Permission will be granted you to examine them in due time.

"Look at the idols before you. They are made of wood. They have eyes but they see not. They have noses but should you pour out perfume before them they will not be able to smell it. They have hands but should you come up to them and offer them your hand they will not respond. They have ears, but they will not hear your greeting; feet have they, but they cannot walk.

"And yet these have kept me from coming to Christ for many years. They have sent hundreds of my people into perdition and, though wood, they will yet be the means of sending countless numbers of souls into hell under the power of Satan. Shall we save them? They that make them and keep them are like them. We may gain historical knowledge as has been suggested to me and know all history, but our knowledge will but drive us away from God and will never be sufficient to save us from hell. I lay my-

self open to the consequences if there be any. I will gladly sacrifice myself in saving our people from perdition through these.

"Let me now tell you a story that you have never heard.

"Once upon a time a blind boy was born to a Hopi family. His parents loved him much and so took great care in raising him up. When he was about twelve years old his father made for him a smooth stick by which he was to be led about.

"One day he said to his father, 'Father, I want you to open my eyes. I hear the people talk about things I do not know. I hear them talk about lightning but I do not know how it looks. I want to see the people.'

"But his father said he could not do that but that a great doctor was coming and that when he comes he would open his eyes.

"When he was thirty-six years old this doctor came and examined his eyes. He took him and performed an operation on his eyes. Oh! how much he pained him! How much pain did the medicine cause! He got angry at the doctor because he caused him such pain, but the doctor continued his operation and it was successful. And now for the first time he saw and for the first three weeks he could only see faintly. Then he went to the top of a hill and from there he saw the whole country, but he soon went up on a mesa from where he saw more.

"One day as he was walking he saw an

object in the air which swooped down on a bad smelling thing on the road. It soon began to devour this bad smelling thing. Then it flew away evidently having been satisfied. The next day it came back but this time he brought one other with it. These two feasted on the ill smelling thing and then went away. The boy learned afterward that these two flying things were buzzards and the bad smelling thing was a dead horse. Then day by day these two buzzards came but each time bringing more until the boy could not count them all.

"Now, let me explain this allegory for such it is. The blind boy is myself. My parents loved me. When I was about twelve years old my father initiated me into this ceremony, which is likened to a smooth stick by which I was to be led about. The great doctor that was to come is the Holy Spirit, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He examined my life and performed an operation. The medicine used is the gospel of Jesus Christ. How it did hurt me when it told me of my sins. I got angry at Him but He continued His work until today I can see. The hill and the mesa is the top of experience. I could only see a little at first, but when I went on the top of experience with God I learned more. Then I learned what it was the people talked about, the heavenly things which is represented by lightning. The buzzard is the first white

man who came to the snake dance. The dead horse is the SNAKE DANCE. This white man first watched the snake dance and then went away. But the next time he came he brought another white man with him. This went on until the number increased until today there are so many buzzards feeding on a DEAD HORSE that it is impossible to count them!

"Dear friends, feed on the Living Bread."

After this permission was granted to all to examine the idols. No pictures were taken. By this time the lightning storm was approaching us from the east preceded by a heavy windstorm. Quickly we piled the idols and the altar pieces. After pouring some gasoline on the pile Johnson lit it. Soon the smoke arose from these wretched prisoners and amidst their smoke we sang in Hopi, "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder" the words in Hopi being appropriate for the occasion. As the idols were reduced to ashes the storm also ceased, resulting in a particular calm as though God would have it thus.

Thus passed away the most important Hopi religious ceremony. We pray God that the words of chief Yu-kiw-ma may come true that "the conflagration must spread." I have since then seen a kiva, which has been elsewhere defined, torn down by the unbelievers and made into a wagon shed. This kiva was the place where this ceremony used to be performed.

Yours in our coming Lord and Savior,
Otto Lomavitu.

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